

Denali Commission/Alaska Council on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault

Capitol Project Grant # #06-4-C-5018

Ulla's Place – Sisters Thrift Store and Arts Cooperative

Final Narrative Performance Report

Background:

SAFE sought funding support for construction of Ulla's Place in response to identified needs: a staging area for receipt, storage and distribution of house hold goods and an outlet for arts and crafts produced by program participants and others using SAFE services.

One of the key services that SAFE provides is as a clearing house for donated clothing, furniture and household goods. We do not have a Salvation Army or Bishop's Attic or similar second hand shop in Bristol Bay. SAFE is it. We do this primarily because we need access to a large volume of used clothing and household goods to outfit dozens of women and children (and occasionally men) who are setting up independent household free from violence.

The sheer volume of donations was often overwhelming, both in storage and sorting space and in the number of people available to process. Up until 2000 we did this in an attached garage in the original building. However, in 2001 we had to move counseling offices into the garage forcing us to take the donations out to two unheated container vans we had purchased and parked on the premises. This in turn require us to stop accepting donations during the winter months since it was too cold to work in the vans and we had no storage space.

In addition to the problem with receiving and distributing donations, we also had shelter residents and other program participants who needed an outlet for their hand crafts and who would also benefit from job training opportunities.

We believed that construction of a building to house a thrift shop and arts/crafts cooperative would address both these needs.

Activities:

During the project period a 24' X 24' addition with a permanent foundation was build onto the 16' x 20' Facility Manager shop (on skids) to house Ulla's Place Thrift shop. Display fixtures were purchased and installed along with basic equipment – phones, packaging and sales supplies, cash register, etc. The initial operating plan was implemented and the store opened for business on December 4, 2004. During the construction phase, we also had an unprecedented opportunity to asphalt the driveway and parking lot at the SAFE shelter/Ulla's Place because of a state highway construction project that had made it economically feasible for the contractor to bring the asphaltting equipment to town. A quick response from the Rasmuson Foundation enabled us to dovetail funds with the Ulla's Place grant to pay for the paving costs. The result not only looks terrific, it has cut down considerably on the dust (which presents a real problem for many of the children in residence), has cut road maintenance costs and reduced the wear and tear on SAFE's truck and employee/customers vehicles.

The project overall was implemented pretty much as originally envisioned with some pleasant surprises highlighted below.

Cost Containment (applies to capital projects only):

Documentation attached to prior grant reports provide a unit cost analysis. The project itself went slightly over budget (\$4,000) primarily because of delays that resulted in higher labor costs. SAFE used cash donations and reserve funds to cover the cost of the overages. For the most part, final costs and capacity of the project closely matched what was originally proposed.

Project Outcomes:

Ulla's Place has been a blessing to SAFE and the people we serve since the very first day. Regular hours of operation include some coverage with paid staff but primarily with volunteers including the Dillingham Girls Scouts who manage the shop on Saturdays. We had hoped to get some job training and skill building out of work in Ulla's Place but didn't anticipate that we'd get as much as we have or that youth in our community would be so eager to work the shop. We also originally anticipated (or at least would have been satisfied with) taking in up to \$250 a month, enough to cover the cost of heat, lights and normal maintenance. We averaged nearly \$800 in the first two months of operation and hope to maintain at least twice the regular monthly income originally projected. We also didn't anticipate what a joyful thing Ulla's Place would be – a gathering place for neighbors and friends – like a perpetual garage sale – and a wonderful place to drop off all those things you don't want or need anymore but are too nice to take to the dump.

The only negative, if you can call it that, is that it became immediately apparent that Ulla's Place is nearly big enough. We'd hoped to be able to use the building for multiple uses including group meetings at night and a work room for arts and crafts. Not a chance! The place is filled to the roof with clothing, furniture, baby toys, books and other household goods. We will be looking for additional grant sources in the near future

to go up with a second story to house a meeting/arts & crafts workshop to better meet the arts cooperative aspect of the original Ulla's Place vision.

Problems Encountered:

There were problems and lots of them, but none that we would describe as major. The problem that seemed to cause the most delay, particularly as we neared completion date was the fact that we only have one licensed electrician in town capable of doing the work and he had a full time job elsewhere. This resulted in him often working on the project in the middle of the night, scaring the wits out of the Advocate on duty at the shelter who called the police because someone was rummaging around in the building next door under construction. We addressed the problem by having him call ahead of time to let us know when he'd be in the building at unusual hours. We were just so grateful when he showed up at all!

Conclusions and Recommendations:

Our experience was probably typical of small construction projects in the bush. We had a few delays, a few lucky breaks (the opportunity to pave), some trouble securing reliable workers, etc. We were fortunate to secure an excellent project manager who kept tight control over costs and production and who worked closely with SAFE staff in accountability and documentation. The only advice we'd offer to anyone else attempting a similar project is to "think bigger". The building we have is a wonderful asset to SAFE and we are very grateful for having it. However, hindsight tells us we should have planned for a facility at least twice this size.

Attachments:

Photographs of the project from inception to completion have been submitted previously under prior reports. Attached to this Final Narrative report are copies of additional photographs (opening day sales, etc.) and other publications referencing the project. Also included is a photograph of the acknowledgement of Government support (Denali Commission plaque) on permanent display in Ulla's Place.

1. Acknowledgement of Support:

Please provide evidence (such as a photograph) of the acknowledgement of the Government's support for this project as required in the Financial Assistance Award. For guidelines, please refer to the conditions of the original Financial Assistance Award.

2. Photographs:

Unless previously submitted, please include photographs of the project as required by the Financial Assistance Award.